



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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MEDIA FACT SHEET

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Census shows marriage still the norm for couples

- At the time of the 2006 Census, just under half (49.6%) of all Australians over 15 years of age were married (7.9 million). Between 1996 and 2006 the proportion of people in a registered marriage decreased; in 1996 there were 7.4 million Australians (53.3%) in a registered marriage. The number of people in a registered marriage increased by 500,000 in this period.
- There were around 2.42 million women and 2.86 million men in 2006 who had never been married. Between 1996 and 2006 the number of people who had never been married increased by 24%, or around 1 million people.
- Women were more likely than men to be divorced, separated or widowed. This occurs because women under 75 years of age were more likely to be divorced or separated than men, and in the oldest age group (75 years and over) women were substantially more likely than men to have outlived a marriage partner. For every widower (men) aged over 75 years, there were 4.2 widows (women) in the same age group.
- There were about 4.31 million couple families in Australia. Just over 85% of couples were in registered marriages, and 15% of couples were in defacto relationships. Couples with children are slightly more likely to be in a registered marriage (89%) than couples without children (81%).
- Three in four Australians under 35 years of age had never been married. In the 35–54 year age group, the majority of people were married (64%). Women tend to marry at an earlier age, with a higher proportion of women aged between 15 and 34 years married compared to men of the same age.
- As women tend to live longer than men, a high proportion of women outlive their husbands. Just under 60% of all women aged 75 years and over were widows who had survived their husbands. In contrast, 21% of men in the same age group were widowers who had outlived their wives.
- People aged between 35–54 years were more likely to be divorced or separated than people in any other age group. A smaller proportion of people aged 55 years and over were divorced or separated, as people of this age experienced different laws and attitudes towards divorce during most of their married life. The smaller proportion of people aged over 75 years who were divorced may also be partly explained by people who had entered a second marriage.

NB: The figures in this fact sheet exclude overseas visitors. Where an answer to a question has not been provided (i.e. not stated) these occurrences form a separate category in the data and therefore some percentages do not total to 100%.

Source: ABS 2006 Census.

Table 1.1 Marital status, people aged 15 years and over, Australia, 1996 Census - 2006 Census

	2006			1996			Increase 1996-2001 Persons '000
	Male '000	Female '000	Persons '000	Male '000	Female '000	Persons '000	
Married	3 944.4	3 956.3	7 900.7	3 704.7	3 710.4	7 415.1	485.6
Never married	2 855.1	2 423.5	5 278.6	2 334.1	1 910.5	4 244.6	1 034.1
Divorced, Separated, Widowed	978.5	1 760.3	2 738.8	778.1	1 477.2	2 255.2	483.5
Total	7 777.9	8 140.2	15 918.1	6 816.8	7 098.1	13 914.9	2 003.2

Table 1.2. Marital status, people aged 15 years and over, Australia, 1996 Census - 2006 Census

	2006			1996			Increase 1996-2001 Persons %
	Male %	Female %	Persons %	Male %	Female %	Persons %	
Married	50.7	48.6	49.6	54.3	52.3	53.3	6.5
Never married	36.7	29.8	33.2	34.2	26.9	30.5	24.4
Divorced, Separated, Widowed	12.6	21.6	17.2	11.4	20.8	16.2	21.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	14.4

Table 2. 2006 Census: Registered and social marital status of couple families, Australia

	Total number families '000	Registered marriage '000	Defacto marriage '000	Registered marriage %	Defacto marriage %
Couple families with children	2 362.6	2 101.0	261.6	88.9	11.1
Couple families without children	1 943.6	1 564.6	379.0	80.5	19.5
Total couple families	4 306.2	3 665.6	640.6	85.1	14.9

Table 3. 2006 Census: Registered marital status by age, population aged 15 years and over, Australia

	Age group (years)							
	15-34		35-54		55-74		75 and over	
	' 000	%	' 000	%	' 000	%	' 000	%
Male								
Never married	2 126.0	78.8	575.0	20.6	125.5	7.1	28.5	5.5
Widowed	2.0	0.1	15.0	0.5	62.4	3.5	106.5	20.6
Divorced - Separated	57.1	2.1	416.4	14.9	281.2	15.9	37.8	7.3
Married	513.4	19.0	1 790.8	64.0	1 295.4	73.4	344.7	66.6

Total	2 698.5	100.0	2 797.3	100.0	1 764.6	100.0	517.5	100.0
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Female

Never married	1 888.4	70.4	422.5	14.6	80.7	4.5	31.9	4.2
Widowed	4.7	0.2	48.4	1.7	249.3	13.8	448.4	59.5
Divorced - Separated	99.3	3.7	553.1	19.1	312.6	17.4	44.5	5.9
Married	689.7	25.7	1 879.0	64.7	1 159.0	64.3	228.7	30.4
Total	2 682.2	100.0	2 903.0	100.0	1 801.5	100.0	753.4	100.0

Total

Never married	4 014.5	74.6	997.6	17.5	206.2	5.8	60.4	4.7
Widowed	6.8	0.1	63.5	1.1	311.7	8.7	554.9	43.7
Divorced - Separated	156.4	2.9	969.6	17.0	593.8	16.7	82.2	6.5
Married	1 203.1	22.4	3 669.8	64.4	2 454.4	68.8	573.4	45.1
Total	5 380.7	100.0	5 700.4	100.0	3 566.1	100.0	1 270.9	100.0

Table 4.1. 2006 Census: Registered marital status, state and territories(a)

	NSW %	Vic. %	Qld %	SA %	WA %	Tas. %	NT %	ACT %	Aust. %
Married	50.1	50.0	49.1	49.5	49.5	49.2	42.6	47.7	49.6
Never married	32.7	33.4	33.2	31.9	33.7	31.3	41.7	37.2	33.2
Widowed, Divorced, Separated	17.2	16.5	17.7	18.6	16.7	19.4	15.6	15.1	17.2

(a) Capital City Statistical Division.

Table 4.2. 2006 Census: Registered marital status, capital cities(a)

	Sydney %	Melbourne %	Brisbane %	Adelaide %	Perth %	Hobart %	Darwin %	Canberra %
Married	49.7	49.3	48.1	48.0	49.0	46.4	41.6	47.8
Never married	34.4	34.8	35.0	33.3	34.3	34.0	41.9	37.1
Widowed, Divorced, Separated	15.9	15.9	16.8	18.8	16.7	19.6	16.5	15.0

(a) Capital City Statistical Division.

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